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ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1999, all of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) had to be aligned with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. This handbook describes the PSSA writing assessment, which was designed to measure individual student performance and to influence instruction. The guide contains a chart of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing and an overview of the assessment that describes modes of writing and the purposes of the assessment. Two chapters on elements of the assessment focus on strategies in writing and the writing sample for grades 6, 9, and 11. A chapter on "Assessing Writing" presents the domain scoring guide and a description of the domains. "Reporting Writing Assessment Results" discusses the results of the "Strategies in Writing" section of the assessment and the results of the Writing Assessment itself. Samples of student essays are presented for grades 6, 9, and 11. Two appendixes contain a list of members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee and a description of sources describing testing accommodations. (SLD)

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The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

Writing Assessment Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

The *Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)* uses a school-based assessment system that provides comparative data to schools and districts for use in planning and informing the public. In the 2001-2002 school year, regulation provides for individual student scores to be reported for Writing, Reading, and Mathematics assessments as the PSSA emphasizes a system for increased student accountability.

This publication presents an overview of the state assessment system and a description of the Writing Assessment. ***The Pennsylvania Literacy Framework (PCRP III)*** - Spring 2001 can assist classroom teachers in instructional methods and techniques that support and enhance the writing process underlying the assessment. Assessment handbooks also are available for mathematics and reading. One copy of each of these documents can be obtained by sending a mailing label to:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Evaluation and Reports
333 Market Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

OVERVIEW OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

On October 21, 1998, the State Board of Education adopted final-form regulations for the new Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania School Code. Upon conclusion of the regulatory review process, it was published in the January 16, 1999, Pennsylvania Bulletin as final rulemaking, binding on all public schools in the Commonwealth.

The new Chapter 4 replaces the previously adopted Chapters 3 and 5 and provides a new direction for the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). Beginning with the 1998-99 assessment, the PSSA became standards-based. This means that, beginning with the February/March 1999 testing, all of the PSSA assessment had to be aligned with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. The movement to standards was adopted as a major focus of the Chapter 4 regulations, and those for Mathematics and for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening were included as an Appendix to Chapter 4. These Academic Standards have been widely distributed and can be found on the Pennsylvania Department of Education Web site: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/

As outlined in Chapter 4, the purposes of the statewide assessment component of the PSSA are now the following:

1. Provide students, parents, educators and citizens with an understanding of student and school performance.

2. Determine the degree to which school programs enable students to attain proficiency of academic standards.

3. Provide results to school districts (including charter schools), PRRI, APs and AVTSs for consideration in the development of strategic plans.

4. Provide information to state policymakers including the General Assembly and the Board on how effective schools are in promoting and demonstrating student proficiency of academic standards.

5. Provide information to the general public on school performance.

6. Provide results to school districts (including charter schools) and AVTSs based upon the aggregate performance of all students, for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and for those without an IEP.

Although mathematics and reading standards were adopted at the grade 3, 5, 8, and 11 levels, since 1999, the assessment for these content areas was conducted only at grades 5, 8, and 11. The writing assessment for the 2001 - 2002 school year will be conducted as follows: Grades 6 and 9 in October and Grade 11 in February, but with the addition of standards-based results for both schools and individual students reported. The new *Domain Scoring Guide*, seen on page 15 of this handbook, will be used again this year for the writing assessment. The Department has conducted a "generalizability" study in order to redesign the writing assessment to provide valid and reliable individual student results. A "generalizability" study is a study that evaluates the advantages and disadvantages in selecting a particular type of assessment and the scoring method for that assessment (e.g., two 40-minute sessions versus a single 60-minute session, or a holistic scoring rubric versus a domain-based scoring rubric). The Department will announce the recommended changes from the "generalizability" study when they

are available. The Department is currently beginning work on the establishment of proficiency levels for the PSSA Writing Assessments for school year 2002 -2003.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Division of Evaluation and Reports personnel have been greatly assisted in the development of the writing assessment by a group of teachers, supervisors and other educators who constitute the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee **(WAAC)**.

Committee work has also included developing *The Pennsylvania Domain Scoring Guide* for the scoring of the essays. In addition, the committee provides assistance in categorizing, aligning the items within the assessment to meet the Writing Academic Standards, including reviewing for bias and grade appropriateness for large scale assessments.

The Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Advisory Committee members are the educators who chose the concepts on which all writing assessments are based. The committee consists of teachers from all grade levels, supervisors, curriculum directors, administrators, policy makers and college specialists.

Among the WAAC's defined responsibilities are to:

- know the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing.
- develop the PSSA Writing Assessment's performance tasks and statements.
- make recommendations to strengthen and expand the PSSA.
- articulate the long-term goals and objectives of the PSSA to parents, employees and the community.
- provide in-service training to local school districts.
- provide training and staff development for classroom and large-scale assessment.
- attend Writing Assessment Advisory Committee meetings, rangefinding, scoring sessions, prompt development sessions, and annual meetings.

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing

1.4. Types of Writing			
1.4.3. GRADE 3	**1.4.5. GRADE 5**	**1.4.8. GRADE 8**	**1.4.11. GRADE 11**
Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every student to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to:			
A. Write narrative pieces (e.g., stories, poems, plays). • Include detailed descriptions of people, places and things. • Use relevant illustrations. • Include literary elements (Standard 1.3.3.B.).	A. Write poems, plays and multi-paragraph stories. • Include detailed descriptions of people, places and things. • Use relevant illustrations. • Utilize dialogue. • Apply literary conflict. • Include literary elements (Standard 1.3.5.B.). • Use literary devices (Standard 1.3.5.C.).	A. Write short stories, poems and plays. • Apply varying organizational methods. • Use relevant illustrations. • Utilize dialogue. • Apply literary conflict. • Include literary elements (Standard 1.3.8.B.) . • Use literary devices (Standard 1.3.8.C.).	A. Write short stories, poems and plays. • Apply varying organizational methods. • Use relevant illustrations. • Utilize dialogue. • Apply literary conflict. • Include varying characteristics (e.g., from limerick to epic, from whimsical to dramatic). • Include literary elements (Standard 1.3.11.B.) . • Use literary devices (Standard 1.3.11.C.).
B. Write informational pieces (e.g., descriptions, letters, reports, instructions) using illustrations when relevant.	B. Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (e.g., essays, descriptions, letters, reports, instructions). • Include cause and effect. • Develop a problem and solution when appropriate to the topic. • Use relevant graphics (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs).	B. Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (e.g., letters, descriptions, reports, instructions, essays, articles, interviews). • Include cause and effect. • Develop a problem and solution when appropriate to the topic. • Use relevant graphics (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs). • Use primary and secondary sources.	B. Write complex informational pieces (e.g., research papers, analyses, evaluations, essays). • Include a variety of methods to develop the main idea. • Use precise language and specific detail. • Include cause and effect. • Use relevant graphics (e.g., maps, charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, photographs). • Use primary and secondary sources.

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C. Write an opinion and support it with facts.	C. Write persuasive pieces with a clearly stated position or opinion and supporting detail, citing sources when needed.	C. Write persuasive pieces. • Include a clearly stated position or opinion. • Include convincing, elaborated and properly cited evidence. • Develop reader interest. • Anticipate and counter reader concerns and arguments. D. Maintain a written record of activities, course work, experience, honors and interests.	C. Write persuasive pieces. • Include a clearly stated position or opinion. • Include convincing, elaborated and properly cited evidence. • Develop reader interest. • Anticipate and counter reader concerns and arguments. • Include a variety of methods to advance the argument or position. D. Maintain a written record of activities, course work, experience, honors and interests. E. Write a personal resume.

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1.5. Quality of Writing			
1.5.3. GRADE 3	1.5.5. GRADE 5	1.5.8. GRADE 8	1.5.11. GRADE 11
Pennsylvania's public schools shall teach, challenge and support every student to realize his or her maximum potential and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to:			
A. Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task and audience.	A. Write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task and audience.	A. Write with a sharp, distinct focus. • Identify topic, task and audience. • Establish a single point of view.	A. Write with a sharp, distinct focus. • Identify topic, task and audience. • Establish and maintain a single point of view.
B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic. • Gather and organize information. • Write a series of related sentences or paragraphs with one central idea. • Incorporate details relevant and appropriate to the topic.	B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic. • Gather, organize and select the most effective information appropriate for the topic, task and audience. • Write paragraphs that have a topic sentence and supporting details.	B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic. • Gather, determine validity and reliability of and organize information. • Employ the most effective format for purpose and audience. • Write paragraphs that have details and information specific to the topic and relevant to the focus.	B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic. • Gather, determine validity and reliability of, analyze and organize information. • Employ the most effective format for purpose and audience. • Write fully developed paragraphs that have details and information specific to the topic and relevant to the focus.
C. Write with controlled and/or subtle organization. • Sustain a logical order. • Include a recognizable beginning, middle and end.	C. Write with controlled and/or subtle organization. • Sustain a logical order within sentences and between paragraphs using meaningful transitions. • Include an identifiable introduction, body and conclusion.	C. Write with controlled and/or subtle organization. • Sustain a logical order within sentences and between paragraphs using meaningful transitions. • Establish topic and purpose in the introduction. • Reiterate the topic and purpose in the conclusion.	C. Write with controlled and/or subtle organization. • Sustain a logical order throughout the piece. • Include an effective introduction and conclusion.

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D. Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition. • Use sentences of differing lengths and complexities. • Use descriptive words and action verbs.	D. Write with an understanding of the stylistic aspects of composition. • Use different types and lengths of sentences. • Use precise language including adjectives, adverbs, action verbs and specific details that convey the writer's meaning. • Develop and maintain a consistent voice.	D. Write with an understanding of the stylistic aspects of composition. • Use different types and lengths of sentences. • Use tone and voice through the use of precise language.	D. Write with a command of the stylistic aspects of composition. • Use different types and lengths of sentences. • Use precise language.
E. Revise writing to improve detail and order by identifying missing information and determining whether ideas follow logically.	E. Revise writing to improve organization and word choice; check the logic, order of ideas and precision of vocabulary.	E. Revise writing after rethinking logic of organization and rechecking central idea, content, paragraph development, level of detail, style, tone and word choice.	E. Revise writing to improve style, word choice, sentence variety and subtlety of meaning after rethinking how questions of purpose, audience and genre have been addressed.
F. Edit writing using the conventions of language. • Spell common, frequently used words correctly. • Use capital letters correctly (first word in sentences, proper nouns, pronoun "I"). • Punctuate correctly (periods, exclamation points, question marks, commas in a series). • Use nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions properly. • Use complete sentences (simple, compound, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative).	F. Edit writing using the conventions of language. • Spell common, frequently used words correctly. • Use capital letters correctly. • Punctuate correctly (periods, exclamation points, question marks, commas, quotation marks, apostrophes). • Use nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections properly. • Use complete sentences (simple, compound, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative).	F. Edit writing using the conventions of language. • Spell common, frequently used words correctly. • Use capital letters correctly. • Punctuate correctly (periods, exclamation points, question marks, commas, quotation marks, apostrophes, colons, semicolons, parentheses). • Use nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections properly. • Use complete sentences (simple, compound, complex, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative).	F. Edit writing using the conventions of language. • Spell all words correctly. • Use capital letters correctly. • Punctuate correctly (periods, exclamation points, question marks, commas, quotation marks, apostrophes, colons, semicolons, parentheses, hyphens, brackets, ellipses). • Use nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections properly. • Use complete sentences (simple, compound, complex, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative).
G. Present and/or defend written work for publication when appropriate.	G. Present and/or defend written work for publication when appropriate.	G. Present and/or defend written work for publication when appropriate.	G. Present and/or defend written work for publication when appropriate.

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OVERVIEW OF THE WRITING ASSESSMENT

In recognition of the vital role that writing plays in our lives, the development of a student's ability to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences has become one of the desired goals for communications instruction in schools.

In 1989, as part of a continuing review of the conceptual bases for statewide testing, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee (WAAC) was formed to design a writing test that would measure students' ability to write for different purposes. To do this, the committee members examined writing research, investigated various types of writing assessments being used by several other states and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and studied the implications of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's framework for integrating communication skills across the curriculum. During this review, it became apparent that, because of the complexity of the writing process, an adequate conception of writing must be established. Since a single, simple definition of writing may fail to capture this complexity, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee recommends the following operational definition of writing presented by the National Council of Teachers of English and supported by the ***Pennsylvania Framework.***

> Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and, often longer units of discourse. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables: ***method of development*** (narrating, explaining, describing, reporting and persuading); ***tone*** (from personal to quite formal); ***form*** (from a limerick to a formal letter to a long research report); ***purpose*** (from discovering and expressing personal feelings and values to conducting the impersonal "business" of everyday life); and ***possible audiences*** (oneself, classmates, a teacher, "the world"). Learning to write and to write increasingly well involves developing increasing skill and sensitivity in selecting from and combining these variables to shape particular messages. It also involves learning to conform to conventions of the printed language, appropriate to the age of the writer and to the form, purpose and tone of the message. Beyond the pragmatic purpose of shaping messages to others, writing can be a means of self-discovery, of finding out what we believe, know, and cannot find words or circumstances to say to others. Writing can be a deeply personal act of shaping our perception of the world and our relationships to people and things in that world. Thus, writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous and continuing effort of all teachers.[1]

In keeping with the active nature of performance assessment (i.e., students knowing and doing) this writing assessment is performance-based rather than an objective measure of isolated skills. As Breland and Jones indicate, direct assessment of writing samples gets at certain kinds of skills that multiple-choice tests, no matter how constructed, simply cannot measure, namely: "(1) the ability to organize ideas in logical and coherent expository prose; (2) the ability to structure thought in a recognizable rhetorical pattern, i.e., the simple beginning, middle, and end; (3) the ability to demonstrate fluency and ease in the invention of appropriate syntactical patterns; and (4) the ability to identify and employ an appropriate tone and style to match a presumed audience."

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[1] Breland, Hunter M. and Robert J. Jones, (1982). ***Perceptions of Writing Skill.*** (ETS RR NO. 8247). New York: College Board Publications.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education believes this performance assessment of writing will enhance instructional efforts by encouraging teachers to design instruction around thoughtful, effective and meaningful writing tasks.

The writing assessment provides a broad measure of students' abilities to write for a variety of purposes, specifically to inform, narrate and persuade in all subject areas.

The writing assessment is to serve as a model in both form and process. This model includes administration, product, evaluation and reporting. The Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Advisory Committee members develop prompts, conduct range finding and mirror studies, write and revise the handbook, and provide staff development. They become resource persons who may train their colleagues to score and/or assist in the development of district writing assessment systems.

Districts are encouraged to use the procedures and methods described in this handbook to create prompts and score writing samples as part of their district level assessment programs. District programs could include other types of writing assignments and other methods of assessment, such as holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, and continuous-progress portfolios.

Modes of Writing

Even before the state included these types of writing in its academic standards, the WAAC identified three "modes" or types of writing to be among the most important in school and in life, and to be most appropriate for the state assessment.

Informational Writing

Informational writing is used to share knowledge and convey messages, instructions or ideas by making connections between the familiar and unfamiliar. It is assessed because it is used as a common writing strategy in academic, personal and job-related areas; as a tool that spans a range of thinking skills from recall to analysis and evaluation; and as a means of presenting information in prose. This type of writing has many functions: *to present information through reporting, explaining, directing, summarizing and defining; to organize and analyze information through explaining, comparing, contrasting and relaying cause/effect; or to evaluate information through judging, ranking or deciding.*

Narrative Writing

Narrative writing relates a series of events of an actual occurrence or a proposed occurrence at a particular time and in a particular place. It requires writers to closely observe, explore and reflect upon a wide range of experiences. At all grade levels, the functions of this mode of writing are to *narrate or reminisce.*

Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing moves the reader to take an action or to form or change an opinion. This type of writing is assessed for three reasons: 1) it requires thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation; 2) it requires writers to choose from a variety of situations and to take a stand, and 3) it is a skill frequently used in school and the workplace. Persuasive writing has several functions: *to state and support a position, opinion or issue; or to defend, to refute or to argue.*

Purposes of the Writing Assessment

The writing assessment provides information to individual students, buildings, and school districts about the current status of students' writing and a process that monitors writing skill development. This assessment was designed to evaluate individual performances as well as to influence instruction. The purposes of the assessment are to:

- measure individual student performance in writing;
- measure performance in writing within a school and demonstrate growth within a district;
- monitor progress toward communication and writing achievement in Pennsylvania schools;
- provide information to help teachers strengthen their writing programs;
- provide information that will reinforce the value of writing;
- encourage more writing in Pennsylvania classrooms;
- encourage different types of writing in Pennsylvania classrooms;
- encourage school districts to develop a systematic program for improving the quality of writing;
- encourage staff development in domain scoring; and
- encourage districts to provide staff development in writing instruction and assessment.

The state writing assessment is intended to evaluate performances of individual students, to provide comparative data about the school's writing program, and to serve as a validity check of the school's local assessment of writing.

ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT: STRATEGIES IN WRITING

The writing process consists of various strategies students use before, during and after writing. Effective use of these strategies is evidenced by good writers. Not all of the strategies need to be used each time one writes; rather, one needs to be able to select and apply those strategies that best suit the writing task and situation. Students must be taught these strategies and given regular and ample opportunities to practice them.

The first items students encounter on the writing assessment relate to specific strategies used in the writing process. They are asked to respond to the following:

Your teachers can teach or show you skills that will help you as you learn to write. Below are six skills that may help you write better. Read each one and mark "Yes" if you have been taught this in school. If you have not been taught this in school, mark "No."

I have been taught	Yes	No
1. to use prewriting skills such as brainstorming, listing, mapping and outlining.	○	○
2. to use different types of writing.	○	○
3. to revise and edit my writing.	○	○
4. to discuss my writing with my teachers.	○	○
5. to discuss my writing with my classmates.	○	○
6. to use a computer for writing.	○	○

When you write, you, your classmates and your teachers can use activities to improve your writing. Below are 11 activities that may help you improve your writing. Read each one carefully and mark the column that describes how often you participate in this activity.

	Every Day	Every Week	Every Month	Every Grading Period	Never
7. I plan, brainstorm, map or read to gather ideas before I write	○	○	○	○	○
8. I write about topics I choose	○	○	○	○	○
9. I write stories, plays, poems and essays in school	○	○	○	○	○
10. I write reports, letters and essays for classes other than English	○	○	○	○	○
11. I use a computer to write	○	○	○	○	○
12. I have opportunities to discuss my writing with my teachers	○	○	○	○	○
13. I have opportunities to discuss my writing with my classmates	○	○	○	○	○
14. I revise and edit my writing	○	○	○	○	○
15. I share my writing with an audience other than my classmates and teachers	○	○	○	○	○
16. My teachers read students' writing to the class	○	○	○	○	○
17. My teachers share their own writing with their students	○	○	○	○	○

Computers are playing an increasing role in every student's life. You may even have your own computer at home. Please respond to the following statements about computers.

	Every Day	At Least 3 Times a Week	Once a Week	Less Than Once a Week	Never
18. How frequently do you use a computer at school?	○	○	○	○	○
19. How frequently do you use a computer outside of school?	○	○	○	○	○

20. I use a computer for the following *(mark all that apply)*:

- ○ e-mail
- ○ word processing
- ○ to buy things
- ○ to go to chat rooms
- ○ to do Internet searches
- ○ for instruction
- ○ to take a test

21. I use the following tools when I write on a computer *(mark all that apply)*:

- ○ Spell Checker
- ○ Dictionary
- ○ Cut & Paste
- ○ I do not use any of the tools listed.

22. Do you like using a computer?

- ○ I like using a computer a lot.
- ○ I like using a computer a little.
- ○ I neither like nor dislike using a computer.
- ○ I don't like using a computer very much.
- ○ I strongly dislike using a computer.

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ELEMENTS OF THE ASSESSMENT: THE WRITING SAMPLE

ADMINISTRATION OF THE WRITING ASSESSMENT

SPECIAL NOTE: All information about test administration in this publication is tentative. IU, district, and school administrators and teachers are strongly advised to watch for and follow *Assessment Updates* that the Pennsylvania Department of Education will issue to a District's Assessment Coordinator.

EXCEPTION: In the Pittsburgh School District and the Philadelphia City School District each school's principal is the Assessment Coordinator.

SIXTH GRADE WRITING ASSESSMENT

OCTOBER 2001

Guidelines for the administration of the assessment are sent to district assessment coordinators prior to the assessment, and test administrators also receive administration directions in time to preview them. Beginning with the 2000 assessment, students will be given two common prompts.

The time allotted will be 60 minutes per prompt response. Students must respond to both prompts. During that time, students are encouraged to select and apply the elements of the writing process that will enable them to develop and produce their responses. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee strongly recommends that students take time to plan their essay responses, using some pre-writing techniques, such as outlining and mapping as suggested in Writing Standard 1.5, Quality of Writing. In addition, *State Board of Education of Pennsylvania Regulations, Chapter 4 Academic Standards and Assessment*, Section 1.51c. and d. support the Writing Assessment.

Students are not permitted to use a dictionary, thesaurus or electronic spell checker in compliance with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing. Although elements of the writing process are incorporated in the assessment, it is a large-scale, on-demand performance assessment, and students are not permitted to get assistance from teachers or peers. However, students may use an original copy of the *Domain Scoring Guide*.

NINTH GRADE WRITING ASSESSMENT

OCTOBER 2001

Guidelines for the administration of the assessment are sent to district assessment coordinators prior to the assessment, and test administrators also receive administration directions in time to preview them. Beginning with the 2000 assessment, students will be given two common prompts.

The time allotted will be 60 minutes per prompt response. Students must respond to both prompts. During that time, students are encouraged to select and apply the elements of the writing process that will enable them to develop and produce their responses. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee strongly recommends that students take time to plan their essay responses, using some pre-writing techniques, such as outlining and mapping as suggested in Writing Standard 1.5, Quality of Writing. In

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addition, *State Board of Education of Pennsylvania Regulations, Chapter 4 Academic Standards and Assessment*, Section 1.51c. and d. support the Writing Assessment.

Students are not permitted to use a dictionary, thesaurus or electronic spell checker in compliance with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing. Although elements of the writing process are incorporated in the assessment, it is a large-scale, on-demand performance assessment, and they are not permitted to get assistance from teachers or peers. However, students may use an original copy of the *Domain Scoring Guide.*

ELEVENTH GRADE WRITING ASSESSMENT

SPRING 2002

Guidelines for the administration of the assessment are sent to district assessment coordinators prior to the assessment, and test administrators also receive administration directions in time to preview them. Beginning with the 2001 assessment, students may be given three common prompts, one in each of the three modes of writing.

The time allotted will be 60 minutes per prompt response. Students must submit all three responses. During that time, students are encouraged to select and apply the elements of the writing process that will enable them to develop and produce their responses. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee strongly recommends that students take time to plan their essay responses, using some pre-writing techniques, such as outlining and mapping as suggested in Writing Standard 1.5, Quality of Writing. In addition, *State Board of Education of Pennsylvania Regulations, Chapter 4 Academic Standards and Assessment*, Section 1.51c. and d. support the Writing Assessment.

Students are not permitted to use a dictionary, thesaurus or electronic spell checker in compliance with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing. Although elements of the writing process are incorporated in the assessment, it is a large-scale, on-demand performance assessment, and they are not permitted to get assistance from teachers or peers. However, students may use an original copy of the *Domain Scoring Guide.*

TESTING ENVIRONMENT

The test setting is of the utmost importance for the writing assessment. The following guidelines are strongly recommended.

- The writing assessment should be administered in the classrooms, not large group areas, such as the auditorium or the cafeteria.
- The classrooms should be quiet and well lighted.
- The classrooms should contain an adequate supply of scratch paper, pens, and/or sharpened pencils.
- Members of the English Language Arts department should administer the writing assessment.

THE WRITING PROMPTS

One of the most critical tasks in the design of the writing assessment is the development of the writing prompts. A **prompt** is a statement or group of statements about a specific topic, constructed to motivate students' thoughts and elicit their best writing on the topic. Prompts that specify the purpose and

audience have been developed to elicit the mode of writing required. Before prompts are used in an assessment, they are field-tested to ensure that they are fair to all students.

The prompts have a common set of directions that can be read by the test administrator as the students read along silently. Following each prompt is a set of five guideline statements. Each statement refers directly to one of the five domains that correspond to the *characteristics of effective writing*. These statements are designed to assist students by making assessment expectations known.

See sample prompts in the new separate documents: *2000-2001 Grade 6, 9, and 11 Anchor Writing Supplements*.

ASSESSING WRITING

The Domain Scoring Guide

The *Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Domain Scoring Guide* addresses the five characteristics of effective writing. The interplay of these characteristics and the scoring criteria is graphically represented in the domain scoring guide. The five characteristics—focus, content, organization, style, and conventions—have been deemed significant to any piece of writing.

Writers should be able to demonstrate their ability to respond appropriately to a prompt, which specifies the purpose for their writing and the audience. Writers are expected to concentrate their writing skills on the mode that is indicated by the prompt. However, any one composition may integrate more than one mode of writing. This idea touches on one of the goals of the writing assessment: the assessment should elicit authentic writing. For example, it is rare to find a piece of pure narration without some informational passages. Even the best persuasive pieces incorporate some informational writing, often interspersed with imaginative and narrative passages. This integration occurs very naturally; however, the writer should develop one controlling mode of writing specific to the task.

Definition of Domain Scoring

Domain scoring, a valid method for scoring individual writing, is used to evaluate students' writing. Each of the five characteristics of effective writing is a "domain." Each domain is scored separately on a 4-point scale to indicate the writer's level of competence. Scores of 3 and 4 characterize acceptable writing while scores of 1 and 2 characterize unacceptable writing. Any given paper may be acceptable in some domains while unacceptable in other domains.

Description of the Domains

The domain of focus, the single controlling point made with an awareness of task (mode) about a specific topic, involves three essential features of a response. One, the writer should make an assertion about that topic. Usually, the assertion takes the form of a thesis statement; however, the assertion may also be strongly implied. Two, the writer should write about the task using the mode of writing stated in the prompt. Three, the writer should clearly address the topic.

The domain of content presents ideas developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons, and/or explanations. The writer should support and explain or elaborate on any assertions. Any points should be clearly developed and made relevant to the assertions. In this domain, the writer should "show" the reader, not "tell."

The domain of organization, the order developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using transitional devices and including introduction and conclusion, concerns the arrangement of the content into an order appropriate for the purpose of the response. The arrangement may be marked by transitional devices within and between paragraphs and should support an underlying functional pattern, e.g., logical, spatial or chronological.

The domain of style reflects the choice, use, and arrangement of words and sentence structures that create tone and voice. The writer should use specific language and sentence structure to develop a voice and tone consistent with and supportive of the assertions. The writer should demonstrate an awareness of audience.

The domain of conventions includes grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation. The writer should demonstrate evident control of these conventions.

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PENNSYLVANIA WRITING ASSESSMENT DOMAIN SCORING GUIDE

	FOCUS	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION	STYLE	CONVENTIONS
	The single controlling point made with an awareness of task (mode) about a specific topic.	*The presence of ideas developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons and/or explanations.*	*The order developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using transitional devices including introduction and conclusion.*	*The choice, use and arrangement of words and sentence structures that create tone and voice.*	*The use of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation.*
4	Sharp, distinct controlling point made about a single topic with evident awareness of task (mode)	Substantial, specific and/or illustrative content demonstrating strong development and sophisticated ideas	Sophisticated arrangement of content with evident and/or subtle transitions	Precise, illustrative use of a variety of words and sentence structures to create consistent writer's voice and tone appropriate to audience	Evident control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation
3	Apparent point made about a single topic with sufficient awareness of task (mode)	Sufficiently developed content with adequate elaboration or explanation	Functional arrangement of content that sustains a logical order with some evidence of transitions	Generic use of a variety of words and sentence structures that may or may not create writer's voice and tone appropriate to audience	Sufficient control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation
2	No apparent point but evidence of a specific topic	Limited content with inadequate elaboration or explanation	Confused or inconsistent arrangement of content with or without attempts at transition	Limited word choice and control of sentence structures that inhibit voice and tone	Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation
1	Minimal evidence of a topic	Superficial and/or minimal content	Minimal control of content arrangement	Minimal variety in word choice and minimal control of sentence structures	Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation

	NON-SCORABLE	OFF-PROMPT
0	• Is illegible; i.e., includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the response • Is incoherent; i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled that response makes no sense • Is insufficient; i.e., does not include enough to assess domains adequately • Is a blank paper	• Is readable but did not respond to prompt

SCORING THE ASSESSMENT

A contractor trained to use the *Pennsylvania Domain Scoring Guide* scores the assessment papers. Members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee select the anchor papers and training papers used to train the professional scorers employed by the contractor. The scorers are carefully monitored for reliability to ensure that Pennsylvania's standards are met.

Periodically, the Division of Evaluation and Reports conducts mirror studies on the papers scored by the contractor. In mirror studies at least 10% of the scored papers are re-scored by Pennsylvania teachers as a reliability check.

REPORTING WRITING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Results of "Strategies in Writing"

The data for this part of the assessment are the number and percentage of students responding to each of the response choices for each strategy (see page 10). School data are provided with comparisons for district and state. When reviewing the data, remember that this is "self-reporting" by students and should be viewed as descriptive of, not prescriptive for, classroom practices. This information can, however, serve as the impetus for reflection on program and instruction and as an indicator for areas in need of strengthening.

Results of the Writing Assessment

Each student will receive his or her scores on the writing assessment. Reports will include separate domain scores for focus, content, organization, style and conventions, along with a total score. In addition to individual student scores, each school district will receive school summary reports containing school, district and state data.

SAMPLES OF STUDENTS' ESSAYS

SIXTH, NINTH AND ELEVENTH GRADE INDIVIDUAL SUPPLEMENTS

2000–2001 Supplement Anchor Sets of Domain Scored student essays for each Prompt will be released at each grade level (6, 9 and 11) after each PSSA Writing Assessment's Administration. The *2000–2001 Supplement Anchor Set Grades 6* and the *2000–2001 Supplement Anchor Set Grade 9* are currently available as Supplements to the *2001 PSSA Writing Assessment Handbook* at:

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/

2000–2001 Supplement Anchor Set Grade 11 will also be available as a supplement and on the Web in the summer of 2001.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

WRITING ASSESSMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Sharon Althouse
Exeter Township School District

Patricia Anderson
Albert Gallatin School District

Patricia Balon
Northern Tioga School District

Michelene Bolsar
Central Bucks School District

Katie Brown
Cornwall-Lebanon School District

Russell Carson
Armstrong School District

Paula Christenson
Berks County Intermediate Unit

Elaine Culbertson
Wallingford-Swarthmore School District

Lillian DeLeo
Northeastern Educational Intermediate Unit

Diane Skiffington Dickson
PDE

Lori Dupnock
United School District

Diane Eckert
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Robert Egolf
Writing Assessment Consultant

Donna Eicher
Hempfield Area School District

Patricia Ely
Reading School District

Marie Fishel
West Perry School District

Andrea Fishman
West Chester University

June Freeman
Hatboro-Horsham School District

Joel Geary
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Cynthia Geesey
Cornwall-Lebanon School District

Elaine Gibbs
Neshaminy School District

Patrick Gribbin
Wilkinsburg School District

Kathleen Guthrie
Allentown City School District

Richard Heyler
Athens Area School District

Joan Higgs
Teaching Consultant

Lucille Jackson
Coatesville Area School District

Jan Janisko
United School District

Barbara Johnson
Central York School District

Tracey Johnston
Clarion University

Florence Kelly
Ridley School District

Mary Jane Koenig
Erie City School District

Karen Kolsky
Philadelphia School District

Maryann Maria
Abington Heights School District

Teresa Marshall
Iroquois School District

Andrea S. Martine
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Susan Means
Cocalico School District

Teri Miller
Butler Area School District

Susan Mowery
Instructional Consultant

Christine Olson
Corry Area School District

Brenda Pearson
Chester-Upland School District

Joseph Petrella
Baldwin-Whitehall School District

Mary Ramirez
Philadelphia School District

Beverly Reber
Pottsgrove School District

Ronald Reed
Farrell Area School District

Bob Reicherter
Selinsgrove Area School District

Ruthann Rheel
Pottsgrove School District

Jamilla Rice
Northside Urban Pathways, Pittsburgh

Cheryl Royer
Central Bucks School District

Robert Rushton
Wilkes-Barre Area School District

Nannette Ruth
Souderton Area School District

Myrna Schaefer
Wilkes-Barre Area School District

Barbara Schomer
Mt. Lebanon School District

Edgar Schuster
Penn State Abington

Susan Boal Shill
Susquehanna Township School District

Nicholas Spennato
Delaware County IU #25 (Retired)

Bruce Steele
Abington Heights School District

Denise Thompson
Northern Tioga School District

Denise VanBriggle
Steelton-Highspire School District

Margaret Viehdorfer
Middletown Area School District

Carol Wagner
Central Columbia School District

Stephen Waldron
Springfield School District

Collin Wansor
Indiana University of PA

Yvonne Beverina Weaver
Trinity Area School District

Linda Whitford
Ambridge Area School District

Dixie Winters
Penn State York

Robert Zanotti
Edinboro University, Retired

Winnie Zanotti
Edinboro University, Retired

APPENDIX B

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION BY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM OF SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

See: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/

Then click: K-12 Schools Fast Find . . . for: Assessment, and then scroll down to: Testing Accommodations for the PSSA, 2000-2001